

## **How to Be A Retainer in the SCA**

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### **What Is A Retainer**

- Historically a retainer is a person in service to someone of a higher rank: Barony, County, Duchy, Kingdom. Feudalism and the class system of the early Middle Ages encouraged a culture of loyalty and service to one's Lord or King in exchange for pay, protection or good favor. There were Ladies in Waiting, Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, Retainers, etc. Many titles for many of the same duties. It's a practice that's reserved almost entirely for the SCA time period, as it had mostly vanished by the seventeenth century.
  - *Coss, P. R. "Bastard Feudalism Revised." Past & Present (Nov. 1989 & May 1991).*
- Baronial or Royal support team.
  - Lord/Lady in waiting
  - Dresser (if needed) – often the fancy garb needs extra help, or their Excellencies will need assistance making sure things sit where they should once they've dressed. Also it's best to always check that the coronets are sitting properly. Windmill point in the center!
  - Brute squad/porter/gopher – fetch or carry things, find a place for gifts if they're in conversation, load or unload & set up – even if they give you the stink eye for doing it.
    - Caveat: if the hats/garb are off, it's okay to let them help. You don't HAVE to load/unload their vehicle, but it's always good to help since they've got a lot more physical stuff to deal with than the average SCAdian.
  - A respectful/confidential ear to listen – everybody needs to take off their public face once in a while. As a retainer, you might be the one that's there. The personage you're with needs to be able to trust you.
  - Backup memory system – it's good to have a notepad & pen on hand in case you're asked to jot something down.

### **A Retainer Is Here to Serve**

- At the core a retainer is there to help people who are no longer in a position to do things for themselves (like waiting in line for half an hour for a dayboard or breaking away from a conversation to use the bathroom).
- We're there to make things... well... prettier. Make sure the Baronial (or Royal) accoutrement is set up – banners, thrones, to be the visible embodiment of pomp and pageantry.
- We are the behind-the-scenes people. Roadies, stage crew, etc. We're there to help make the Baronage/Royalty's event run smoothly. With enough help, everyone's event can still be fun, including yours!

### **Knowing Your 'Audience'**

- It's important to get to know the people you plan to serve (especially if you become a regular volunteer.)

- Likes & dislikes – it’s good to know what kinds of food or habits to help/help avoid.
  - Ex: His Excellency Marcus Does Not Like Asparagus. Not once. Not ever. Her Excellency Desi loves coffee and peanut butter (not together).
- Allergies/health issues – It’s possible you’ll need to be the keeper of something important, like an inhaler, special drink or generally be actively aware of any issues or activities, such as keeping a fighting Personage sunscreensed, hydrated and rested.

### **Being Prepared**

- It’s important when you begin a shift retaining to know if there’s anything you must have on hand
  - Pen & paper, extra tokens they might like to give out, portable snacks
    - (There should hopefully be a ‘Retainer Bag’ for this ready in time for Pennsic)
  - Know where the water/other beverages for refills are.
  - Be aware of the general schedule of things – how long your shift is, who’s meant to replace you.
  - Know your contact for emergencies: the head retainer (hi!) should be your first point of contact, second should be the autocrat/event coordinator.
    - However if there’s a health emergency, the spouse/partner not-in-distress should be your first go-to, THEN let the head retainer know.
  - Take time to get to know your fellow retainers. We’re our own support system – not just for Their Excellencies but for each other.

### **Behavior**

- I’ve heard some say a retainer should be invisible, should anticipate their Personage’s needs without being told or should subsume themselves into their duty. I disagree with all of these.
  - A retainer should keep a respectful distance when on official duty. It can be very easy to slip into friendly banter because, odds are, you’re volunteering to help friends. A friendly face is great, but make sure you also keep the proper tone at an event.
  - A retainer should always ‘listen without listening’. Be aware of the tone of conversation without eavesdropping on content. It may be that the person you’re serving will need you to take something, write something down or your assistance to extricate from a conversation for various reasons.
  - Defer to the Crown/Coronet. Whether you stand behind a Baron or Baroness, Prince or Princess, King or Queen... once the official trappings are on, they are the one in charge and we are there to provide service as they need or ask.
  - That said... know when to put your foot down. If you see His or Her Excellency attempting to haul large loads of things while wearing coronets, respectfully ask them to hand it to you. Some folks you may have to stand in their way to do so. It may seem silly, but once the vestments are on, we’re living the dream of a medieval world.

## **Your Level of Engagement**

- “But what if I don’t have the energy to stand for court or follow people all day?”
  - Ask your head retainer (Hi!) what can be done to accommodate your needs.
    - A chair can be provided in court behind the thrones by the champions.
    - You can sit while guarding the door to the Barony/Royalty room
    - You can ask to be a ‘pinch hitter’ – on hand to relieve someone for a short time, but not assigned to a full shift.
    - Don’t feel obligated to volunteer for heavier work – lifting & carrying, setting up, etc. All types of volunteers are absolutely welcome.
- Time Commitment – if you volunteer, stay in contact with the head retainer (hello!) so that they are aware of your personal schedule and any changes that might arise.

## **Who Is The Head Retainer (Yo!) and What Can/Should They Do For You**

- Scheduling
  - Much like a human resources manager, the head retainer (boo!) is in charge of organizing people to fit what is hopefully a reasonable rotation throughout the event so that everybody has time to do what they want to do in addition to volunteering AND Their Excellencies have as full a contingent of people that their time runs smoothly as well.
- Delegating
  - One person cannot do all things. This can be (was) a very hard lesson to learn. It fits with the adage of ‘many hands make light work’.
  - The HR (ha, see what I did there?) will never ask you to do something that they themselves aren’t willing to do and generally will fill in wherever needed.
  - The Head Retainer (Oh hey that’s me!) will accommodate your abilities, needs and limitations to the best of their abilities (as long as you notify them!) and will do their best to make sure you’re also free to have fun and enjoy the event.

## **Taking Care Of Yourself First**

- HYDRATE.
- EAT.
  - While it is encouraged to be discreet doing so, you ARE allowed to both eat and drink, even if you’re on duty and don’t let anyone berate you for doing so.
  - These may seem like common sense statements, however it can be easy to neglect oneself in the course of taking care of others. You can’t care for others if you yourself are in distress.
- Take time to rest.
  - If you’re on duty and following someone around a busy event, standing at the sidelines of a fighting list or standing in court make sure you take every chance to flex your knees, stretch discreetly. If there’s a spare chair behind the thrones/champions, please SIT IN IT.
  - When you’re relieved of your duties, take time to sit, eat, hydrate. It can be tiring, especially on longer shifts.
  - If you absolutely cannot finish your shift, find the HR (I might be lost!) or one of your fellow retainers and ask if you can be spelled out. Don’t try to push yourself past the point of comfort.
    - (With luck and enough volunteers you shouldn’t have to reach that point!)

**Most Importantly: HAVE FUN! It’s your event too!**

And if you’re not having fun, what’s the point?